

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 22, 2003

The Honorable Richard Pombo
Chairman
Committee on Resources
1324 Longworth H.O.B.
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

We are writing to request a hearing on the recent release of the National Research Council's (NRC) final report entitled "Endangered and Threatened Fishes in the Klamath River Basin," which was commissioned following the 2001 water shut-off in the Klamath Basin. We appreciate your continued dedication to resolving issues in the Basin that affect the livelihoods of so many, and we believe that a hearing before the House Resources Committee would further this goal by examining the findings of this distinguished academic panel, whose independent, peer-reviewed report largely vindicates the agriculture community in the Klamath Basin.

The NRC report confirms that the 2001 decision to shut-off water to the hard-working farming and ranching families in the Basin was not scientifically justified. Although the 334-page NRC report addresses a broad range of issues pertaining to the decline and recovery of the Lost River and shortnose sucker fish and the coho salmon, the report takes particular issue with the linkage of lake levels in Upper Klamath Lake to the mortality rate of two species of sucker fish. Specifically, the report states

"There is no evidence of a causal connection between water level and water quality or fish mortality over the broad operating range in the 1990s, the period for which the most complete data are available for Upper Klamath Lake. Neither mass mortality of fish nor extremes of poor water quality shows any detectable relationship to water level. Thus, despite theoretical speculations, there is no basis in evidence for optimism that manipulation of water levels has the potential to moderate mass mortality of suckers in Upper Klamath Lake."

The NRC report also concluded that there is insufficient evidence to assign responsibility for the September 2002 fish die-off of Chinook salmon, which some prematurely blamed on the diversion of water to support Klamath Basin irrigators located nearly 200 hundred miles upstream. The report stated that, "it is unclear what the effect of specific amounts of additional flow drawn from controllable upstream sources (waters from reservoirs on the Trinity River or Iron Gate Reservoir) would have been."

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We appreciate your consideration of this request and hope that you believe, as we do, that a public airing of the issues discussed in this report is warranted. We stand ready to assist you in this endeavor in any way that is helpful.

Sincerely,


GREG WALDEN
Member of Congress


WALLY HERGER
Member of Congress


JOHN DOOLITTLE
Member of Congress